



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP  
appointed to be read  
in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth  
on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2015, the Eleventh Sunday of the Year

### THE CHURCH'S "BEST-KEPT SECRET"

Dear Servants of Jesus,

The General Election produced a surprising result: 30 of the 31 parliamentary constituencies serving our Diocese of Portsmouth returned a Tory MP! After the Election we wrote to all our MPs to offer them the prayers of the Catholic community. Those who serve us in public office, local and national, carry a huge responsibility, often at great personal cost. We are grateful to them and we pray for them. For Christians, politics, of course, is always about more than economics and statistics, cuts and benefits.<sup>1</sup> It is about building a society founded on authentically human values: respect for life from conception to natural death, supporting marriage and the family, the dignity of work, caring for the poor, safeguarding the environment and promoting peace at home and abroad. Sometimes people envisage British values as 'decency,' the NHS, red pillar-boxes or warm beer. No! What makes Britain great is fidelity to our Christian patrimony, a concern for justice, freedom and the rule of law, values derived from love of God and neighbour, fused with our native genius.<sup>2</sup>

Anytime now, Pope Francis will publish an Encyclical Letter on ecology. When he does, I will send a message drawing attention to matters I consider important for our Diocese. You will have your own ideas too, which I hope you will feed into your local Evangelisation Strategy Team. But here, I want to discuss what is sometimes called the "Church's best kept secret":<sup>3</sup> the extensive body of Catholic doctrine on politics, economics, human development and social justice.<sup>4</sup> The principles of Church social teaching are very relevant as daily we witness the tragedy of human trafficking, the plight of migrants, financial scandals, debates about regulating the market-place and the impact of civil war and terrorism. Our faith is not 'me and Jesus' but 'we and Jesus.' The Lord has incorporated us into His Church so that together we can build the Kingdom of God. Private actions

have broad consequences. Just as the sins we commit cause a spiral of social decline, so too the good we do empowers a wheel of progress.<sup>5</sup> This is why I would like every parish to set up a Justice, Peace and Social Responsibility team and to study, besides the new encyclical, Pope Benedict's Letter, *Caritas in Veritate* ('Love in Truth').<sup>6</sup>

There are three principles to bear in mind.<sup>7</sup> First – some of you may feel uneasy hearing this – we are not the owners but only the stewards of what we have. After all, when we die, we cannot take stuff with us. God allows us to amass property, savings and goods only so that, after serving our families and ourselves, we can show a preferential love for the poor. This principle, the “universal destination of goods,” means that everyone should have access to what they need for their fulfilment.<sup>8</sup> In a free-market consumer-culture, this is a revolutionary doctrine, yet one captured well by CAFOD's recent slogan “Live Simply”.<sup>9</sup> Many in our Diocese are converted to this. But I ask again that each parish and Pastoral Area consider: What does poverty mean in our context? How might we serve better the poorest in our midst?<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, solidarity. Contemporary culture is obsessed with the autonomy of the individual: even buying a drink of coffee now requires the barista to write your name on the cup, so specialised are people's preferences. Yet in truth, we are all one family.<sup>11</sup> The principle of solidarity or fraternity reminds us we are God's children and thus brothers and sisters. We are bound to promote the dignity, value and equality of every person,<sup>12</sup> espousing truth, freedom and justice in relationships at work and at home, at school and at leisure.<sup>13</sup> We need to appraise everything we do. For example, think of your work: is it entirely good or are some practices unjust?<sup>14</sup> As Catholics, when we see the suffering of others, we cannot retreat into the comfort of our living rooms.<sup>15</sup>

And thirdly, the common good.<sup>16</sup> Each one of us forms part of a society, and so we must promote, besides our own welfare, the welfare of everyone at the local, national and international level. This has important political implications for the reciprocal rights and duties of persons and societies. In civil society, every institution must see itself at the service of the lower, not ‘over’ but ‘under’ it, with a focus on the family as the basic social cell.<sup>17</sup> Although the Church does not endorse any one political or economic system, I fear there is a real danger in Britain today, with advances in technology and as traditional Christian values are eclipsed, of a slide towards ever greater State control. This is why as Catholics we have a critical duty to participate vociferously in the democratic process, contributing our distinctive, saving message.

In conclusion, we know that nowadays many aspects of Catholic teaching, not least on sexuality and authority, are countercultural. Even some Catholics reject them. Yet this does not mean that Jesus got things wrong. Like the sowing in today's Gospel, we pray the seeds will one day germinate,<sup>18</sup> which is why we need to find more effective ways of communicating the Gospel, giving witness to it by the holiness of our lives. Many politicians and policy makers find Catholic social teaching fascinating. They acknowledge that the Church speaks coherently from Scripture and Tradition. As missionary disciples, each one of us should strive to know our faith better and its meaning. So, inspired by the example of Blessed Oscar Romero, let us put this intention before Mary

Immaculate and St. Edmund of Abingdon. Moreover, in this month of June, let us often say the Litany of the Sacred Heart, drawing fresh vigour from Jesus, Whose Heart is the “abode of justice and love.”<sup>19</sup>

Thank you for listening!

In Corde Iesu  
+ Philip  
Bishop of Portsmouth.

---

<sup>1</sup> There is an intrinsic link between technology, economics and politics. Advances in technology can bring about economic progress but also set economic problems for society, hence the need for governments and policy-makers to help order the market. See B. Lonergan *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan Volume 3. Insight. A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto University Press: 1992) 232-237 and following.

<sup>2</sup> See the remarks made by Pope Benedict in his *Address to Politicians, Diplomats, Academics and Business Leaders at Westminster Hall* 17<sup>th</sup> September 2010 available online at [www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/Replay-the-Visit/Speeches/Speeches-17-September/Pope-Benedict-s-address-to-Politicians-Diplomats-Academics-and-Business-Leaders](http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/Replay-the-Visit/Speeches/Speeches-17-September/Pope-Benedict-s-address-to-Politicians-Diplomats-Academics-and-Business-Leaders) (June 2015)

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Aloysius Lopez Cartagenas *Unlocking the Church's Best-Kept Secret. Principles for the Interpretation, Communication and Praxis of Catholic Social Teaching* (University of the Philippines Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> See especially *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2419-2425

<sup>5</sup> For a succinct account of this, see B. Lonergan *Method in Theology* (London, DLT: 1974) 52-55

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XI *Caritas in Veritate* (London, CTS: 2009). Also available online from [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) (June 2015)

<sup>7</sup> Although there was much before, it is only since the Industrial Revolution that the Church has developed a comprehensive body of teaching on diverse social issues. The main documents are:

- Leo XIII *Rerum Novarum* (1891) on issues raised by Industrial Revolution such as class division, rights of workers to form unions, just wage, the dignity of human work;
- Pius XI *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) on capitalism and communism;
- St. John XXIII *Mater et Magistra* (1961) on the social nature of being human, subsidiarity and the nature of democracy;
- St. John XXIII *Pacem in Terris* (1963) on nuclear disarmament, the international order, war and peace, the common good, rights and duties.
- Vatican II *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965) on freedom of conscience;
- Paul VI *Populorum Progressio* (1967) on international development, the gap between rich and poor, and the role of international aid.

St. John Paul II wrote three Encyclical Letters on social teaching: *Laborem Exercens* (1981) which developed a theology of human work, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) on justice, human rights and human freedom, and *Centesimus Annus* (1991) on solidarity, the dignity of human person and the Church's preferential love for the poor. In 2004, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace produced the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, forming a comprehensive catechism of Church social teaching to that point. In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI wrote *Caritas in Veritate* which marks the fortieth anniversary of Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*. Its publication was delayed by the then economic crisis and the need to address its issues. The forthcoming Encyclical on the environment from Pope Francis will add to this corpus of teaching.

<sup>8</sup> See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2005) – henceforth referred to as *Compendium* - 171-184.

<sup>9</sup> It was Mhatma Ghandi who coined the phrase “Live simply so that others may simply live.” See CAFOD website, and also [www.cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Campaigning-guide/Become-a-LiveSimply-parish](http://www.cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Campaigning-guide/Become-a-LiveSimply-parish) (June 2015)

<sup>10</sup> I raised these questions when we launched our recent Year of Faith in Action: see the Pastoral Message on the diocesan website [www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk) (June 2015). Our diocesan Social Research Unit has already assembled a raft of social indices and data covering each parish of the

---

diocese: more details from [bishopsecretary@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](mailto:bishopsecretary@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk). This will also become later in the year the main focus of Caritas Diocese of Portsmouth: [cvirgo@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](mailto:cvirgo@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk)

<sup>11</sup> “The many situations of inequality, poverty and injustice, are signs not only of a profound lack of fraternity, but also of the absence of a culture of solidarity. New ideologies, characterized by rampant individualism, egocentrism and materialistic consumerism, weaken social bonds, fuelling that “throw away” mentality which leads to contempt for, and the abandonment of, the weakest and those considered “useless”. In this way human coexistence increasingly tends to resemble a mere *do ut des* which is both pragmatic and selfish” Pope Francis *Message for the World Day of Peace 2014* available online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) (June 2015)

<sup>12</sup> *Compendium* 164-170. See also *Catechism* 2234-2246.

<sup>13</sup> See *Compendium* 197-208.

<sup>14</sup> Read the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12) whilst prayerfully reflecting on your work or business.

<sup>15</sup> Read Mt 25: 31-46 on the Last Judgment. When you die and stand before the Lord, what will you say to Him if He points out to you a mother whose baby died for lack of food costing less than the last glass of wine you drank?

<sup>16</sup> The common good is “the sum of those conditions of social life by which individuals, families and groups can achieve their own fulfillment in a relatively thorough and ready way” *Gaudium et Spes* 74.

<sup>17</sup> “The demands of the common good are dependent on the social conditions of each historical period and are strictly connected to respect for and the integral promotion of the person and his fundamental rights. These demands concern above all the commitment to peace, the organization of the State's powers, a sound juridical system, the protection of the environment, and the provision of essential services to all, some of which are at the same time human rights: food, housing, work, education and access to culture, transportation, basic health care, the freedom of communication and expression, and the protection of religious freedom. Nor must one forget the contribution that every nation is required in duty to make towards a true worldwide cooperation for the common good of the whole of humanity and for future generations also” *Compendium* 166.

<sup>18</sup> See Mark 4: 26-34

<sup>19</sup> ‘*Cor Iesu, iustitiae et amore receptaculum, miserere nobis.*’ The Litany of the Sacred Heart originated in France in the early 18C and was approved for use in public worship by Leo XIII in 1899. It is widely available in most Catholic prayer books and online.